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Smoked Skipper

By W. W. JACOBS, "Many Cargoes" and "The Skipper's Wooting."

[Copyright, 1900, by W. W. Jacobs.]

"Wapping Old Stairs," said the rough individual, shouldering the brand new sea chest and starting off at a trot with it; "yus, I know the place, captin. Fust v'y'ge, sir?"

"Aye, aye, my hearty," replied the owner of the chest, a small, ill looking lad of 14. "Not so fast with those timbers of yours. D'ye hear?"

"All right, sir," said the man and, slackening his pace, twisted his head round to take stock of his companion. "This ain't your fust v'y'ge, captin," he said admiringly. "Don't tell me. I could twig that directly I see you. Ho,

what's the use o' trying to aim it over a poor 'ard working man like that?" "I don't think there's much about the sea I don't know," said the boy in a satisfied voice. "Starboard, starboard

your hellum a bit." The man obeyed promptly. They went the remainder of the distance in this fashion, to the great inconvenience of people coming from the other di-

"And a cheap 'arf crown's worth, too, captin," said the man as he thoughtfully put the chest down at the head of the stairs and sat on !t pending payment.

"I want to go off to the Susan Jane," said the boy, turning to a waterman who was sitting in his boat, holding on to the side of the steps with his hand. "All right." said the man. "Give us a hold o' your box."

"Put it aboard," said the boy to the other man.

"A' right, captin," said the man, with a cheerful smile; "but I'll 'ave my 'arf crown fust if you don't mind." "But you said sixpence at the sta-

tion," said the boy. "Two an' sixpence, captin," said the man, still smiling; "but I'm a bit 'usky, an p'r'aps you didn't 'ear the two. 'Arf a crown's the regler price. We ain't allowed to do it under.'

"Well, I won't tell anybody," said the boy. "Give the man 'is 'art crown," said the waterman, with sudden heat. "That's 'is price, an my fare's 18

"All right," said the boy readily, "cheap too. I didn't know the price, that's all. But I can't pay either of you till I get aboard. I've only got sixpence. I'll tell the captain to give you the rest."

"Tell 'oo?" demanded the light porter with some violence "The captain," said the boy.

"Look 'ere, you give me that 'arf crown," said the other, "else I'll chuck your box overboard an you after it." "Wait a minute then," said the boy, darting away up the narrow alley which led to the stairs. "I'll go and get change.

"'E's goin to change 'arf a suvren or p'raps a suvren," said the waterman. "You'd better make it five bob, matey." "Ah, an you make yours more," said "I don't want to start by quarreling," the light porter cordially. "Well, I'm- said Ralph seriously.

"Get off that box," said the big policeman who had come back with the boy. "Take your sixpence and go. If I catch you down this way again"-

He finished the sentence by taking the fellow by the scruff of the neck and giving him a violent push as he passed "Waterman's fare is threepence," he

said to the boy as the man in the boat with an utterly expressionless face took the chest from him. "I'll stay here till he has put you aboard."

The boy took his seat, and the waterman, breathing hard, pulled out toward the vessels in the tier. He looked at the



"Remember this 'ere ship's a pirate." oy and then at the figure on the steps and apparently suppressing a strong inclination to speak spat violently over

"Fine big chap, ain't he?" said the boy. The waterman, affecting not to hear, dooked over his shoulder and pulled strongly with his left toward a small schooner, from the deck of which a couple of men were watching the small

figure in the boat. "That's the boy I was going to tell you about," said the skipper, "and remember this 'ere ship's a pirate."

"It's gut a lot o' pirates aboard of it," said the pate fiercely, as he turned and regarded the crew, "a set o' lazy, loafing, idle, worthless"-"It's for the boy's sake," interrupted

"Where'd you pick 'im up?" inquired

the other. "He's the son of a friend o' mine what I've brought aboard to oblige,"

replied the skipper. "He's got a fancy for being a pirate, so just to oblige his father I told him we was a pirate. He wouldn't have come if I hadn't."

"I'll pirate him," said the mate, rubbing his hands.

"He's a dreadful 'andful by all accounts," continued the other. "Got his 'ed stuffed full o' these 'ere penny dreadfuls till they've turned his brain almost. He started by being an Indian and goin off on 'is own with two other kids. When 'e wanted to turn cannibal, the other two objected and gave 'im in charge. After that he did a bit o' burgling, and it cost 'is old man no end e' money to hush it up."

"Well, what did you want him for?" grumbled the mate.

"I'm goin to knock the nonsense out of him," said the skipper softly as the boat grazed the side. "Just step for ard and let the hands know what's expected of 'em. When we get to sea, it won't matter."

The mate moved off grumbling as the small fare stood on the thwarts and scrambled up over the side. The waterman passed up the chest and, dropping the coppers into his pocket, pushed off again without a word.

"Well, you've got here all right, Ralph," said the sk pper. "What do you think of her?" "She's a rakish looking craft," said

the boy, looking round the dingy old tub with much satisfaction. where's your arms?" "Hush!" said the skipper and laid his

finger on his nose.
"Oh, all right," said the youth testily, "but you might tell me."

"You shall know all in good time," said the skipper patiently, turning to the crew, who came shuffling up, masking broad grins with dirty palms. "Here's a new shipmate for you, my lads. He's small, but he's the right stuff."

The newcomer drew himself up and regarded the crew with some dissatisfaction. For desperadoes they looked far too good tempered and prone to levity.

"What's the matter with you, Jem Smithers?" inquired the skipper, scowling at a huge fair haired man who was laughing discordantly.

"I was thinkin o' the last party I kill-

ed, sir," said Jem with sudden gravity. "I allers laugh when I think 'ow be squealed." "You laugh too much," said the other sternly as he laid a hand on Ralph's shoulder. "Take a lesson from this fine

feller. He doesn't laugh. He acts. Take 'im down below an show him 'is bunk." "Will you please to follow me, sir?" said Smithers, leading the way below. "I dessay you'll find it a bit stuffy, but that's owing to Bill Dobbs. A reg'ler

old sea dog is Bill, always sleeps in 'ls clothes and never washes? "I don't think the worse of him for that," said Ralph, regarding the fer-

menting Dobbs kindly. "You'd best keep a civil tongue in your 'ed, my lad," said Dobbs shortly. "Never mind 'im," said Smithers cheerfully. "Nobody takes any notice o' old Dobbs. You can 'it 'im if you

like. I won't let him hurt you." You're afraid." said Jem tauntingly

"You'll never make one of us. 'It 'im.

I won't let 'im 'urt you." Thus aroused, the boy, first directing Dobbs' attention to his stomach by a curious duck of his head, much admired as a feint in his neighborhood, struck him in the face. The next moment the forecastle was in an uproar and Raiph prostrate on Dobbs' knees frantically reminding Jem of his prom-

"All right, I won't let 'im 'urt you," said Jem consolingly.

"But he is burting me." yelled the "He is burting me now." Well, wait till I get 'im ashore," said Jem. "His old woman won't know him

when I've done with him'

The boy's reply to this was a torren of shrill abuse, principally directed to Jem's facial shortcomings

"Now, don't get rude," said the sea man, grinning. "Squint eyes!" cried Ralph fiercely.

"When you've done with that 'ere young gentleman, Dobbs," said Jem with exquisite politeness, "I should like to 'ave 'im for a little bit to teach 'im manners.'

"'E don't want to go," said Dobbs grinning, as Ralph clung to him. "He knows who's kind to him." "Wait till I get a chance at you,"

sobbed Ralph as Jem took him away from Dobbs. "Lord lumme," said Jem, regarding him in astonishment. "Why, he's ac-

tooally cryin. I've seen a good many pirates in my time, Bill, but this is "Leave the boy alone," said the cook, a fat, good natured man. "Here, come

ere, old man. They don't mean no Glad to escape, Ralph made his way over to the cook, grinding his teeth with shame as the cook took him between his knees and mopped his eyes with something which he called a

"You'll be all right," he said kindly. "You'll be as good a pirate as any of us before you've finished."

handkerchief.

"Walt till the first engagement, that's all," sobbed the boy. "If somebody don't get shot in the back, it won't be my fault."

The two seamen looked at each other. "That's wot hurt my 'and, then," said Dobbs slowly. "I thought it was a fackknife."

He reached over and unceremoniously grabbing the boy by the collar pulled him toward him and drew a small, cheap revolver from his pocket. "Look at that, Jem!"

"Take your fingers off the blarsted

trigger, and then I will," said the other

somewhat sourly. "I'll pitch it overboard," said Dobbs.

"Don't be a fool, Bill," said Smithers, pocketing it. "That's worth a few pints o' anybody's money. Stand out o' the way, Bill. The pirit king wants to go

Bill stood aside as the boy went to the ladder and allowing him to get up four or five steps did the rest for him with his shoulder. The boy reached the deck on all fours and, regaining a more dignified position as soon as possible, went and leaned over the side, regarding with lofty contempt the busy drudges on wharf and river.

They sailed at midnight and brought up in the early dawn in Longreach, where a lighter loaded with barrels came alongside, and the boy smelled romance and mystery when he learned that they contained powder. They took in ten tons, the lighter drifted away, the hatches were put on, and they started once more.

It was his first voyage, and he regarded with eager interest the craft passing up and down. He had made his peace with the seamen, and they regaled him with blood curdling stories of their adventures in the vain hope of borrifying him.

"'E's a beastly little rascal, that's



"Look at that, Jem!"

had surprised himself by his powers of narration. "Fancy larin when I told 'im of pitchip the baby to the sharks." "'E's all right, Bill," said the cook softly. "Wait till you've got seven of

"What are you doing here, boy?" demanded the skipper as Ralph, finding the seaman's yarns somewhat lacking in interest, strolled aft with his hands in his pockets.

"Nothing," said the boy, staring.
"Keep the other end o' the ship," said the skipper sharply, "an go an 'elp the cook with the taters." Ralph hesitated, but a grin on the mate's face decided him.

be said loftily. "Oh, indeed," said the skipper politely. "An wot might you 'ave come for,

"I didn't come here to peel potatoes,"

"To fight the enemy," said Ralph shortly.

"Come 'ere." said the skipper. The boy came slowly toward him. "Now, look 'ere," said the skipper: "I'm going to try and knock a littlesense into that stupid 'ed o' yours. I've 'eard all about your silly little games ashore. Your father said he couldn't manage you, so I'm a-goin to have a try, an you'll find I'm a very different sort o' man to deal with to wot 'e is. The idea o' thinking this ship was a pirate. Why, a boy your age ought to

days." "You told me you was," said the boy hotly, "else I wouldn't have come." "That's just why I told you," said the skipper. "But I didn't think you'd be such a fool as to believe it. Pirates indeed! Do we look like pirates?"

know there ain't such things nowa-

sneer. "You look more like". "Like wot?" asked the skipper, edging closer to him. "Eh, like wot?" "I forget the word," said Ralph, with strong good sense. "Don't tell any lies now," said the

"You don't," said the boy, with a

skipper, flushing as he beard a chuckle from the mate. "Go on. Out with it. I'll give you just two minutes." "I forget it," persisted Ralph.
"Dustman?" suggested the mate, coming to his assistance. "Coster.

chimbley sweep, mudlark, pickpocket, convict, washerwom"-"If you'll look after your duty. George, Instead o' interferin in matters that don't concern you," said the skipper in a choking voice, "I shall be obliged. Now, then, you boy, what

were you going to say-I was like?" "Like the mate," said Ralph slowly. "Don't tell lies," said the skipper furiously. "You couldn't have forgot that word."

"I didn't forget it." said Ralph, "but I didn't know how you'd like it." The skipper looked at him dubiously

and, pushing his cap from his brow, scratched his head. "And I didn't know how the mate 'ud

like it either," continued the boy. He relieved the skipper from an awkward dilemma by walking off to the galley and starting on a bowl of pota-

ed him blankly for some time and then looked around at the mate. "You won't get much change out of 'im," said the latter, with a nod, "in-

The master of the Ibusan Jane watch-

sultin little devil." The other made no reply, but as soon

as his potatoes were finished set his young friend to clean the brasswork and after that to tidy the cabin up and